The Signal

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by 305unreal

Summary

After her best friend Hannibal proposes to his long-term boyfriend, Will, Bev solicits help from her friend Jimmy to find 'The One' for her life. She manages to get a date with Alana, a girl she met at her usual neighborhood bar but threatens to scare Alana away when she accidentally reveals her love for her on the very first date. Meanwhile, Hannibal accidentally hits Will in the eye with the champagne stopper after they get engaged, forcing him to wear an eyepatch.

Bev and Hannibal have been best friends for nearly a decade, since college, and now they live together (with Will, too) in a Baltimore apartment. Bev is snacking before dinner when Hannibal approaches. He kneels on one knee and opens a ring box.

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes, perfect!" Bev grins at him, helping him off the floor." And then you're engaged, you pop the champagne, you drink a toast, you have sex on the kitchen floor… on second thought, don't have sex on *our* kitchen floor."

"Of course. Thank you for helping me plan this out, Beverly."

"Are you kidding? It's you and Will! Who better than your best lesbian friend? I've been there for all the big moments of you and Will: The night you met, your first date, other first things…."

Hannibal bows his head slightly. "Apologies again. We thought you were asleep."

Bev doesn't look too impressed. "It's physics, Hannibal, if the bottom bunk moves, the top bunk moves too." She shakes her head and leans over the table for her wine glass when she suddenly freezes. "My god, you're getting engaged *tonight*."

"Yes, I am."

He smiles, but inside, his heart thuds against his ribcage. Will is always unpredictable; Hannibal has never been able to expect his next move.

Bev calls up Jimmy, asking to meet him at the bar in fifteen minutes. There's no need to ask which bar; they've always gone to the same bar since they were old enough to drink.

Upon seeing him, without preamble, she says, “You know, ever since college, it’s been Hannibal, Will, and me. Now it’s going to be Hannibal and Will, and me. They’ll get married, and start a family. Before long, I’m that weird, middle-aged lesbian their kids call *Auntie Bev*.”

“Bev, have you forgotten what I said to you the night we met?”

“We met in the restroom because you just turned 21, and you were too drunk to realize you went through the wrong door.”

“And I said, *Bev, I’m going to teach you how to live*. I told you to get a haircut, wear a suit, and don’t even think about marriage until you’re thirty.”

“Okay… yeah,” she concedes. “But my best friend is getting engaged, so it’s forcing me to think about that stuff.”

“I thought I was your best friend,” he mock-pouts. “Bev, say I’m your best friend.”

“You’re my best friend, Jimmy.”

“Good,” he grins. “Then as your best friend, I suggest we play a little game I like to call *Have you met Bev?*”

Before she can protest, Jimmy taps a lady’s shoulder at the bar and says, “Hi, have you met Bev?”

He brushes his hands and walks away, leaving Bev to fend for herself. The woman turns around and smiles.

“Hi, I’m Bella.”

“It’s a very pretty name.”

“Thanks, it’s French.”

Back at the apartment, Will walks into the apartment after a long day. Hannibal greets him with a smile, but Will isn’t having it.

“I am exhausted. It was Finger Painting Day at school, and a five-year-old boy got to second base with me.” He removes his coat to reveal a purple left-hand print on the right side of his chest. “Who’s for dinner?”

“A surprise,” Hannibal winks. “I think you’ll find I’m full of surprises tonight.”

Will raises an amused eyebrow and walks away, announcing that he’ll be taking a long shower.

At the bar, Bev and Bella have migrated to a booth where Bev talks about Hannibal and Will’s impending engagement.

“I’m so happy for Hannibal, I really am. I just couldn’t imagine settling down right now.”

“Do you think you’ll ever get married?”

“Well, maybe eventually. Some fall day, possibly in Central Park, simple ceremony, we’ll write our own vows. Band, no deejay; people will dance, I’m not going to worry about it! Damn it, why did Hannibal have to get engaged?” She pauses when Bella chuckles. “Yeah, nothing hotter than a girl planning out her own imaginary wedding, huh?”

“I think it’s cute.”

Back at the apartment, Hannibal cooks while a freshly showered and robed Will sits on the counter. He asks Will to continue stirring while he grabs something from the refrigerator.

“Thibaut-Janisson champagne for tonight.”

“Sounds classy.”

“Thibaut-Janisson was born from a long friendship that began in a Grand Cru village in the Champagne region of France and continues today in Blue Ridge Mountains of Charlottesville, Virginia.”

Will smiles at the way his boyfriend somehow managed to find a drink that matches Hannibal’s past in France and Will’s past in Virginia. Staring at Will, just stirring tonight’s meal, he can wait no longer and blurts out the question.

“Will you marry me?”

There’s a tense second where Will’s face freezes. A second later, his hand stops stirring. The second that Hannibal cautiously sets the wine on the table, Will tackles him.

“Of course, I will!”

Hannibal relaxes his grip and lets Will’s momentum carry them to the ground. The younger man latches his mouth first to the corner of Hannibal’s lip, nipping at the bottom, but he soon trails down the side of his neck, surely leaving possessive bruising marks. Hannibal encourages it, his arms tightly gripping Will’s back, pulling him flush to his body. Moans escape the men, but they become so entangled, it’s impossible to know who makes which sound. Will’s hands separate between his grabbing fiancé’s hair and fumbling with his belt. Hannibal is quick to assist while exposing his neck for more fevered bites.

Back at the bar, Bev works up the courage to ask Bella on a date… only for her to confess that she's dating the bartender, Jack. She searches for Jimmy again, desperate to talk about her blunder. Seated on a stool, she knows that Jimmy isn't paying any real attention to her words, but she likes that she can vent to him without repercussions. As she does so, she looks just past him, past the digital clock that reads *6:05*, at the woman across the room.

"Hey Jimmy, see that girl?" She cuts off whatever he's talking about.

He turns around, and a wicked smirk crosses his lips. "Oh, yeah. You know she likes it dirty. Go say *hi*."

She frowns. "I can't just say *hi*. I need a plan," Bev leans closer to Jimmy. "I'm going to wait until she goes to the bathroom, then I'll strategically place myself by the jukebox, so that when she comes…."

"Mm-hmm, *great* plan," Jimmy rolls his eyes. He turns, taps the woman on the shoulder, and stands as she turns. "Hi, have you met Bev?"

He walks away as the girl smiles around her straw and gives his friend a once-over.

"Let me guess," she points at her chest, "Bev."

Bev smiles, and the other woman holds out a hand.

"Alana."

At the apartment, Will and Hannibal lie next to each other in a sprawled mess.

"… fucking hell," Will gasps.

“I promised Beverly we wouldn’t do that.”

“We’re engaged now. Spontaneous sex comes with the territory,” Will grins sleepily. “There’s a Pop-Tart® under the fridge.”

More laughter follows when he sees Hannibal’s facial features screw up in distaste. The older man struggles to sit up and stretch to the nearby table. He grabs the champagne and looks over with a fond smile when he sees that Will has scrambled to collect two collectible glasses of his from below the sink.

“I would like to drink a toast with my fiancée.”

Will smiles at the new terminology being voiced, and he hums delightfully. He crawls over and leans on Hannibal’s shoulder as the latter begins working on opening the bottle of champagne.

“I don’t know why I was so scared of this. It’s pretty easy, right?”

Whatever Will is about to say is cut off when the cork pops and hits Will’s right eye. He screams in unpleasant pain, and Hannibal looks incredibly guilty. He wraps an icepack over his lover’s eye and calls for an Uber. He’s still apologizing to the man when the car pulls up.

“Take us to the hospital,” Hannibal orders the driver.

“Did you hit him?” He asks as Will and Hannibal pile into the backseat.

They start laughing at the implication. Hannibal’s style of laughter is quiet, while Will’s is more hysterical. Hannibal recovers first, and he glances to the front to address their current driver.

“I assure you… Mister Zeller, this is the mistake of a rather egregious bottle of champagne.”

“We’re rougher during sex,” Will adds.

Zeller smirks and turns on the meter.

At the bar, Bev has bought a drink for Alana.

“So, what do you do?”

“I’m a liaison for Metro News 1.” When Bev’s eyes widen, Alana adds, “So far, I only do those dumb little fluff pieces at the end of the news, you know, like, um, a monkey who can play the ukulele, but I’m hoping for something bigger in time.”

“Bigger, like a gorilla with an upright bass?” Bev bites her bottom lip. “Sorry, that slipped out. You’re really pretty.”

Alana laughs not unkindly, and she turns slightly to wave at her friends. Bev follows her gaze and grimaces marginally.

“Your friends don’t look too happy.”

“Yeah, see, the one in the middle just got dumped by his girlfriend, so tonight *everyone* we talk to is *The Enemy*.”

Bev nods, “You know, if it’ll make your friend feel better, you could throw a drink in my face. I don’t mind.”

“Frederick would love that!” Alana smiles conspiratorially. “It does look fun in the movies.”

“Hey, you want to have dinner with me Saturday night?”

Alana winces. “Oh, I can’t. I’m going to Orlando for a week on Friday. Some guy’s attempting to make the world’s biggest pancake and guess who’s covering it.”

“That’s going to take a week?”

“Yeah, he’s going to eat it, too,” she rolls her eyes. “It’s another record.”

Frederick starts making his way over, likely to ask what’s taking so long. Bev notices.

“Uh, I know this is a long shot, but how about tomorrow night?”

“Yeah,” she smiles and slides over her business card. She raises her voice suddenly as she stands. “What the hell!?”

Alana throws her drink at Bev, calling her a bitch, but she sneaks a quick wink at her as she leaves. Jimmy returns to the barstool once Alana joins her friends at the exit. He orders another two drinks with a laugh in his voice.

“Do I hear the Denial Train?”

“We’re going out tomorrow night.”

“I thought we were playing laser tag tomorrow night,” he pouts.

“Yeah, I was never going to go play laser tag,” she confesses, wiping her face with a napkin.

The next night, Bev calls up Alana and meets her at a little bistro in Rosedale. They're seated near the back of the restaurant in front of an unlit fireplace. As Bev pulls out a chair for Alana, the latter's focus is drawn to a plum-coloured mellophone sitting on the mantle.

"That is one badass mellophone."

"Looks like Grimace's penis," Bev replies without thinking.

Her eyes widen, and Bev realizes what she said. Before she can take it back, though, Alana tips her head back and laughs. Bev can't keep her composure and laughs along, drawing a few looks, but they don't care.

An hour later, Bev enters the apartment to find Will and Hannibal sitting on the couch; an eyepatch now rests over Will's injured eye. Winston rests his head on Will's lap, and Hannibal runs his fingers through the dog's fur. The other five dogs are sleeping contently in their separate beds.

"Mom, Dad, I have found the future Mrs. Beverly Katz. How have I always described my perfect woman?"

"Likes dogs," Will speaks first. It's the tick that they share.

"She's got five."

"She drinks Scotch," Hannibal adds.

"She ordered not *just* Scotch, but a Scotch that's old enough to order its own Scotch."

"Quotes obscure lines from *Ghostbusters*," Will tacks on.

“Referenced me as Ray and said, *when someone asks you if you’re a god, you say ‘yes’*.”

“And she doesn’t like olives,” Hannibal finishes.

“She *offered* them to me. Not just the ones on her plate, but a *whole jar* that’s been sitting in her fridge.”

The Olive Theory is based on Hannibal and Will’s relationship. Will has a strong distaste for olives, but Hannibal loves them to garnish his fancy dinner parties. It’s a perfect balance that Bev believes makes them such a great couple.

“Congratulations,” Hannibal dips his head.

“Wait…” Will frowns. “It’s just past 10:30. What happened?”

“She had a story she had to cover. A jumper at the Lombard Street Bridge.”

“Did you kiss?” Hannibal inquires.

“No. Moment wasn’t right.”

Hannibal exhales and tightens his hold around Will’s shoulders when the latter slumps in disbelief.

“Look, this woman could actually be my future wife; I want our first kiss to be amazing.”

“Aw, Bev, that is so sweet,” Will replies in a saccharine tone. “So, you chickened out like a little bitch.”

Hannibal stifles a bark of laughter and drums his fingers along Will’s bicep. Bev doesn’t remain quiet and huffs angrily.

“What? I did not chicken out. You know what? I don’t need to take first-kiss advice from some pirate who hasn’t been single since the first week of college.”

“Bev, anyone who’s single would tell you the same thing. Even the dumbest single person alive, and if you don’t believe me, call him.”

Hannibal dials Jimmy’s number on his mobile and hands it to Bev. She snatches it and calls him to meet her at the bar. The Perfect Couple tag along. Jimmy shows up in his laser tag getup, but no one comments on it, and Bev explains her predicament.

“So, these guys think I chickened out. But she didn’t even give me the signal. What do you think?”

Jimmy scoffs. “Is she going to bat her eyes at you in Morse code?” He bats his eyes at Bev. “*Bev? Kiss me*. No, you just kiss her!”

“Not if you don’t get the signal.”

Demonstrating that you don’t need a signal, Jimmy suddenly leans over and kisses Hannibal, much to the shock of him and his partner. Will growls defensively.

“Did Hannibal give me the signal?”

“No, you did not,” Hannibal answers him, squeezing Will’s shoulder to calm his guard dog.

“But see, at least tonight, I get to sleep knowing that *Hannibal and Me*? Never going to happen. You should’ve kissed her.”

Bev sighs dejectedly. “I should’ve kissed her. Well, maybe in a week, when she gets back from Orlando.”

“A week?” Jimmy repeats. “She’ll forget all about you. Mark my words: you will never see that one again.”

Alana is seen on the TV behind the bar, and Bev points her out, so Will calls for Jack to turn it up.

“*…persuaded him to reconsider, at which point the man came down off the ledge, giving this bizarre story a happy ending. Reporting from Metro News 1, back to you, Bill.*”

Hannibal hums, “He didn’t jump.”

“There are others,” Will whispers, snuggling in his hold.

“I’m going to go kiss her,” Bev decides, “right now.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. “Are you certain that’s a good plan at this time of night?”

“C’mon, I never do anything crazy! I’m always waiting for the moment, planning the moment! She’s leaving tomorrow, and this may be the only moment I’m going to get! I’ve got to do what that girl of the past couldn’t: I’ve got to take the leap… well… maybe not the right metaphor with that guy on the TV. But, I gotta fall in love.”

She walks out with purpose, and Jimmy raises his glass.

“I think it’s a perfect metaphor.” He looks over to Hannibal and Will. “By the way, did I congratulate you two?”

Will rolls his eyes and untangles himself from Hannibal.

“Let’s go.”

Hannibal calls his Uber from earlier, and Zeller pulls over to the curb.

“Hello, again, Mister Zeller.”

“Fancy, Pirate,” he nods to his previous customers. “Charmer and Skittish are new.”

“Skittish needs you to take her to Bread & Circuses,” Bev cuts in, climbing into the passenger seat as the other three of them slide in the back. “And step on it.”

Zeller raises an eyebrow but shrugs and follows her words. Jimmy announces that this escapade will be on his blog and starts typing on his phone as they take off. Had his eyes not been glued to his phone, he might notice Zeller watching him for a moment longer than necessary in the rearview mirror. Hannibal sees and catches the driver’s eyes with a knowing look. When they arrive at the bistro, Bev tells him to wait and keep it running. The car’s inhabitants watch as she runs inside, bypassing the staff. When she returns, she’s holding the plum mellophone, and a waiter is chasing after her. Zeller peels out, changing the course by the address Hannibal provides.

“Everybody brings flowers. I’ve got Grimace’s dick.”

Zeller drives the group to Alana’s house at twenty till one in the morning. Bev asks her friends to wish her luck before she leaves the car.

“Getting it on with a reporter, this just in.” Jimmy grins, putting his hand up for a high-five.

“Kiss the crap out of that girl!” Will cheers moderately.

“Make it count,” Hannibal adds, slipping his hand into Will’s.

Bev nods. “Hannibal, remember this night. When you’re the best man at our wedding and you give a speech, you’re going to tell this story.”

Bev exits the taxi to approach the front door of Alana’s apartment, ignoring Jimmy’s shouts as to why Hannibal will be her best man. As she rings the doorbell, Alana’s dogs begin to bark, and Bev nervously retreats. Her friends wave her back to the other girl’s apartment, and it’s enough that even Zeller nods for her to try again. She visibly takes a deep breath, hands clenching around the mellophone, and she slowly walks back toward Alana’s front door.

“Bev?” Alana calls out from a nearby window.

“Hi! I, I was just uh…” she stammers and holds up the musical instrument.

Alana smiles and, taking in her awkward smile, invites her inside. She glances back at the Uber where Jimmy gives her a proud thumbs-up, and the other couple smile encouragingly at her. Once she’s disappeared inside, Jimmy turns to the driver.

“So, Zeller, you got anyone tonight?”

“You can call me Brian. And not tonight. Are you offering?”

In the apartment, Bev teeters awkwardly on the balls of her feet, and Alana takes pity on her.

“So, Bev, what brings you back to Brooklyn at one in the morning, all dressed up?”

“I… was just hoping to get those olives - that you said I could have.”

“Would you like those olives with some gin and vermouth?”

“Are you trying to get me drunk?”

Alana turns on her stereo, “For starters.”

Bev follows her into the kitchen, silently thanking her. Armed with a glass of vermouth each, the women begin to dance, and Bev explains her correlation between olives and relationships. The dogs quietly sit to the side and watch them dance.

“I think I like your *Olive Theory*.”

“I think I like your new mellophone.”

“I think I like your nose,” Alana bops the tip.

“I think I’m in love with you.”

“What?”

Alana is shocked. All dancing has quit. All movement has quit. Bev isn’t sure if either of them is even breathing. After a long lull with nothing but fading music, Alana finally sets her glass on the coffee table, and Bev copies her movements. Alana sits on the couch, and Bev awkwardly joins her. Bev decides to break the silence by ignoring the confession.

“Orlando, huh? You gonna hit Disney World?”

“You *love* me?” Alana asks.

Bev facepalms. “Oh God, I, I, I can’t believe I said that. Why did I say that? Who says that? I should just go.”

She stands to leave, but Alana puts a hand on her arm to stop her. She hands her a jar of olives and smiles inelegantly.

“Here, I promised you these.”

“Olives, thanks. I love you.” Bev gasps. She can’t believe she just said it again. “What is wrong with me?”

Outside, in the Uber, Jimmy has moved to the passenger seat. He verbally wonders why they’re still sitting here.

“Let’s go, already. A little Yo-ho-ho and a bottle o’ rum?”

Will and Hannibal stare stormily at Jimmy, but he makes hurried gestures.

“‘Cause, you know, you’re a *pirate*.”

Will’s response is to remove the eyepatch and fling it so it strikes Jimmy’s forehead.

Hannibal hastens to add, “We mustn’t abandon Beverly. If her copulation does not fare well, she will require our support.”

“S’been twenty minutes in there for your friend,” Brian comments. “Think they’re doing it?”

“In front of the dogs?” Jimmy waggles his eyebrows.

“Doggy style.”

The men in the front seats laugh and high-five. As they begin to delve into sex stories of the past involving dogs, Will interrupts with a request: they can go to the bar if they shut up.

Eventually, Alana walks Bev to the front door on her way out.

“So, when you tell this story to your friends, could you avoid the word *psycho*?” Bev asks. “I prefer *eccentric*.”

Alana smiles, “Good night, Psycho.”

Bev jokingly grabs her heart, as though it’s breaking. When she turns to walk down the stairs, however, she realizes her friends have ditched her.

“Great, um, how do I get to the F train?”

Alana points, “Oh, um, two blocks that way and take a right.”

“Great…” She stops before she takes the first step and faces Alana. “I’m done being single, I’m not good at it. Look, obviously you can’t tell a woman you just met you love her, but it sucks that you can’t. I’ll tell you something though, if a woman, not you, just some

hypothetical woman, were to bear with me through all this, I think I'd make a damn good wife because that's the stuff I'd be good at. Stuff like making her laugh and being a good mother and walking her five hypothetical dogs. Being a good kisser."

Alana amusedly crosses her arms. "Everyone thinks they're a good kisser."

"Oh, I've got references." She takes a step forward.

"Good night, Bev."

Bev shakes Alana's hand. "And I'm a good hand shaker."

Alana looks into Bev's eyes. "That's a pretty great handshake."

Bev smiles… and then leaves for the train. Having a good idea where her friends ran off to, she heads to the bar. And she tells them how it went. When she gets to the end with the handshake, Hannibal seems to be struggling not to facepalm. Will and Jimmy shake their heads, and Bev calls them out.

"*That* was the signal!" Will stresses.

"With a handshake as long and lingering as you've described," Hannibal clarifies, "You should have kissed her."

"There's no such thing as *the signal*," Jimmy shrugs, "but yeah, that was the signal."

Out of nowhere, Brian joins them, nodding and holding a drink. "Signal."

Brian settles on Jimmy's welcoming lap in order to fit into the booth. Jack, the bartender, delivers champagne and glasses to the table. He gives Bev a once-over.

"By the way, you should've kissed her."

Bev scoffs. "You guys weren't there."

Hannibal smirks as he pops this champagne cork without hurting anyone and pours a round for everyone – himself, Will, Bev, Jimmy, Brian, Jack, and even Bella once he sees that she's joined the crowd.

"I am so turned on right now," Will quietly tells him.

Hannibal only smiles with his eyes.

"Guys, trust me, I've seen the signal. That was not the signal."

Jimmy shushes her. "Yeah Bev, we're not on you anymore."

Hannibal raises a glass and toasts. "To my fiancée."

Will joins him. "To the future."

Brian smiles, "To one hell of a night!"

Bev raises her glass with the others, quietly muttering to herself how that was *not* the signal.

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